

**“Num come; they see what they want; they take it.” –**

**A Contrapuntal Reading of *Doctor Wooreddy’s Prescription for***

***Enduring the Ending of the World***

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Tutkielmassani tarkastelen Mudrooroo Naroginin kirjaa *Doctor Wooreddy’s Prescription for Enduring the Ending of the World*. Kirja kuvaa Tasmanian aboriginaalien joukkotuhon vuosien 1829 ja 1842 välisenä aikana keskittyen erityisesti yhden aboriginaalimiehen, Wooreddyn kokemuksiin.

Tarkastelen kirjaa jälkikoloniaalisten teorioiden näkökulmasta. Lähtökohtana ovat erityisesti Edward Saidin teorial, joista keskeisin on kontrapuntaaliluenta. Kontrapuntaaliluenta tarkoittaa, että lukija ottaa yhtäaikaaisesti huomioon sekä imperialismin vaikutukset, että imperialismin vastustuksen vaikutukset. Lukijan on siis pidettävä mielessä myös ne hiljaiset ryhmät, kuten alkuperäisasukkaat, jotka ovat perinteisesti jääneet marginaaliin.

Koska väitän, että kirja on tarkoitettu vastakertomukseksi perinteiselle, länsimaiselle historialle, ja että se pyrkii antamaan äänen niille, jotka ovat jääneet traditionaalisessa historiassa pimentoon, olen peilannut kirjan tapahtumia juuri niin sanotun virallisen historian kautta. Kirjan genreä olen tarkastellut historiografisen metafiktion kannalta, jonka tunnusomaisia piirteitä romaanista löytyy.

Tutkimukseni on keskittynyt vastakkaisuuksiin: perinteinen historia vastaan vaihtoehtoinen historia sekä imperialismi ja sen vastatoimet. Tämän vuoksi olen myös ottanut mukaan mies-nais-dikotomian ja tarkastellut sitä, millaisen kuvan romaani antaa eri sukupuolista. Tämän lisäksi olen verrannut valkoisen miehen representaatiota aboriginaalimieheen, sekä valkoisen naisen kuvaa aboriginaalinaiseen.

*Dr Wooreddy’s Prescription* ottaa vahvasti kantaa imperialismin seurauksiin, mutta käsittelee aihetta monitahoisesti eikä sen vuoksi sorru syyttämään ainoastaan toista osapuolta. Romaani sekoittaa historiaa ja fiktiota, mikä tekee kirjasta monitulkintaisen sekä relevantin jälkikoloniaalisessa keskustelussa.

Avainsanat: Jälkikoloniaalinen kirjallisuus, Mudrooroo Narogin, Edward Said, Aboriginaalit, Kontrapuntaaliluenta

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## 1 Introduction

The purpose of my pro-gradu thesis is to study Mudrooroo Narogin's novel *Doctor Wooreddy's Prescription for Enduring the Ending of the World* (1983; henceforth cited as DW). The novel relates the story of the last native Tasmanians on Bruny Island who witness the destruction of their civilisation and culture in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century.

The novel describes the arrival of the first British settlers to Tasmania from the point of view of the native inhabitants. The Aborigines watch helplessly when British settlers kill their families and rape their women: "Mangana's wife had been raped and then murdered by *num* (ghosts) that came from the settlement across the strait" (DW 10). Those Aborigines, who manage to avoid being killed, die from previously unfamiliar diseases, as was the case in real life, too (Shaw 1983, 24; Macintyre 1999, 62). These diseases were brought on the Island by the settlers who were mostly convicts deported from the overflowing prisons of their home country (Hill 2009, 9). The Aborigines believe the diseases are caused by a demon, and therefore difficult or impossible to resist: "They kill many, and many die by the sickness they bring... A sickness demon takes those that the ghosts leave alone" (DW 11). Aborigines watch the destruction with resignation knowing that they are powerless in the face of an invincible enemy. Aboriginal characters often make the remark: "It is the times" (DW 24, 57, 104) through the course of the novel, and thus they explain all the horrible deeds their people must endure.

The main character in the novel is a self-proclaimed doctor called Wooreddy. As a small boy he is suddenly overcome by a feeling of the world coming to an end. He decides it is an omen according to which he is destined to witness the ending of the world and survive it (DW 3). He carries the knowledge of the world coming to an end alone, and observes the changes the white people bring with them to his homeland with detachment.

The whole novel concentrates on Wooreddy's life; how he experiences the changes in his country and how he sees the decline of his people's culture. It is made clear to readers that he is to be a witness in this story, and his account of the events will be the truth. The novel ends inevitably with Woodreddy's death (DW 207).

The novel is a mixture of fact and fiction. Most of the characters in the novel are based on actual historical people. For example, there is a character called George Augustus Robinson in the novel, who is based on the real person of the same name whose task was in the 1830's to gather up the last remaining Tasmanians and take them to Flinders Island, a jail-like settlement where they were to be Christianised and civilised (McDougall 2007, 46). Many of the few remaining Aborigines died there. One of the last three surviving Tasmanians was a woman called Truganini (McDougall 2007, 56), which I assume can be linked with the character of Trugernanna in the novel. She is the heroine of the story. Truganini was married to Wooraddy, again a close resemblance to the key character of Wooreddy in this novel. There are several other characters and events that bear similarities with actual history, as well. The time frame in the novel, judging from the names of the characters (i.e. Mr Robinson and Trugernanna) and from actual recorded historical events, is the Black War of Van Diemen's Land (nowadays known as Tasmania) and after. The Black War was a period of violent conflicts between the colonists and the natives that started around 1820's and ended 1832.

The writer of this novel, Mudrooroo Narogin, also known as Colin Johnson, is an Australian Aboriginal writer. He was born on the 21st of August 1938 in Narogin, Western Australia. He changed his name to Mudrooroo in 1988 as a political protest and as a way to highlight his hybrid identity, and took the name of the place where he was born as his last name (Clark 2007, 31). Nowadays, however, Mudrooroo's Aboriginal

descent has been contested in Australian literary circles (Clark 2007, 27). He has been accused of consciously misappropriating an Aboriginal identity to find a place to belong. These charges have seriously undermined his authority as a spokesperson for Aboriginal peoples. But before all this, for thirty years he was regarded as the first published Aboriginal author with his novel, *Wild Cat Falling* in 1965. Besides novels, he has also written studies on Australian Aboriginal literature (*Writing from the Fringe*, 1990) and poetry (*The Song Circle of Jacky and Selected Poems*, 1986). Despite the fact that Mudrooroo's descent is in doubt, he is still known for his efforts to promote the Aboriginal storytelling heritage, and three of his novels, *Long Live Sandawarra* (1979), *Doctor Wooreddy's Prescription for Enduring the Ending of the World* (1983) and *Master of the Ghost Dreaming* (1991) are known as the basis for Aboriginal historical fiction (Toorn 2000, 34-39).

Although Mudrooroo is widely read and studied in Australia, and some of his novels have been translated into German and French, he still remains relatively unknown to European audiences. That was a contributing factor to why I chose this particular novel as a subject for my study. Other reason was my personal interest in Australian literature. But in the course of my research, I have also noticed that Australia is often left out of postcolonial discourse which usually concentrates on African, Caribbean or Indian experiences on colonialism. Altogether Australian indigenous literature has received fairly little attention among European scholars. One reason for this might be the poor availability of Australian novels, at least in this part of the world. Furthermore, I chose *Dr Wooreddy's Prescription* because it is a relatively recent novel and not much researched outside Australia.

In my study I am going to concentrate on the ways the novel participates in the postcolonial discussion. Postcolonial theorising aims at decentering the Western world, and turning the focal point towards the margins (Crane 1996, 25). According to Ralph Crane (1996, 29): “Post-coloniality in Australia and New Zealand thus involves not only writing back to the center, but also recognising and accepting the cultural heterogeneity which defines the post-colonial national identity of each country”.

One of the most prominent figures in the field of postcolonial theory is Edward W. Said who will provide me the main theoretical frame for my study. My analysis is informed with a contrapuntal perspective as formulated by Edward Said. He introduced the term contrapuntal reading in his book *Culture and Imperialism* (1993). According to Said: “contrapuntal reading must take account of both processes, that of imperialism and that of resistance to it” (Said 1993, 79). In other words, to read a text contrapuntally is to be aware not only of metropolitan history but also other histories that co-exist in the margins (Said 1993, 59). The aim of contrapuntal reading is to hear the voices of the colonised who are often forgotten in postcolonial discourse, where the focus has traditionally been on the colonisers.

I am placing my study mainly on the field of post-colonial studies. However, due to my subject matter, anthropology is also a crucial part of my thesis, and it can hardly be avoided when studying the different roles of the colonisers and the colonised. Said places great stress for the role anthropology has played “in the study and representation of ‘primitive’ or less-developed non-Western societies by Western colonialism, the exploitation of dependence, the oppression of peasants, and the manipulation or management of native societies for imperial purposes” (Said 2000, 295). According to Said, this realisation of anthropology’s role has led to many debates and turmoil within

the discipline (Said 2000, 296). Nevertheless, it will offer my thesis much needed background information.

Alongside anthropology, history is an important part of my research, and in order to study the counter narrative in *Dr. Wooreddy's Prescription* we have to bear in mind the official narrative to which Mudrooroo gives another angle. The official history of Australia almost completely ignored the existence of indigenous peoples for a long time. According to many historians, in the 19<sup>th</sup> century especially, Australia was regarded as *terra nullius* (a land belonging to no one), an empty and void place, until Captain James Cook “discovered” it in 1770 (Brennan 2001, 132). Still in the middle of the twentieth century, official history books had only brief remarks about the previous inhabitants of the continent. A crucial change in the historical narrative of Australia began to take place in the 1970s when the indigenous political movement strengthened, and Aboriginal peoples started to receive recognition and the position as the true victims of Australia’s colonisation (Jennett 2001, 123). Before that decade, the white population, which consisted mostly of convicts, was considered to be the victims (Curthoys 2005, 166-167). As these issues arise from actual historical events, the past and the present are a crucial part of the discussion I am taking part in with my study.

I will start my thesis by introducing some useful theories relating to the subject at hand, and by examining the ways with which Mudrooroo rewrites history. Then I shall study the novel contrapuntally alongside with the official history of Australia. I will continue by introducing narratives of victimology and how those have changed over the years. I shall also include analysis on the aspects of historiographic metafiction in *Dr. Wooreddy's Prescription*. I will examine how Wooreddy’s testimony on the events compare with white history and how language, the different ceremonies and myths work



as forms of resistance in the novel. Furthermore, as this is a study of opposites or opposing views, I shall also consider how the histories and stories of men and women differ from one another. Women have been in the margins much in the same way the colonised peoples were. In a way, they have their own counter-narrative to male dominant history. Moreover, indigenous women are often described as 'doubly colonised' by imperialism and patriarchy, which shall be discussed further in chapter 4. I will analyse how women are portrayed in the text, and whether they have a voice in the story. I will also examine how white men and Aboriginal men are depicted in the novel. Finally, a little glimpse on gender relations; how different relationships are portrayed. I have included the descriptions of various relationships as they reveal the status of women with respect to men.

## 2 Rewriting History

Western Imperial politics has had longstanding consequences that are still felt today in the formerly colonised countries. Edward Said describes this situation very aptly in his essay “Representing the Colonized”: “(p)eoples of the world whose experience as dependents, subalterns, and subjects of the West did not end – to paraphrase from [Frantz] Fanon – when the last white policeman left and the last European flag came down” (Said 2000, 294). The subaltern, here referred to by Said, was a term originally introduced by Antonio Gramsci meaning those in inferior position, whether because of race, class, gender, sexual orientation, ethnicity or religion (Gramsci 1975, 20).

A group of South Asian scholars, The Subaltern Studies Group became interested in the postcolonial and post-imperial societies and adopted the term “subaltern” in the 1980’s (Biswas 2009, 9). They continued its use in the following sense: “The ‘subaltern’ always stands in an ambiguous relation to power - subordinate to it but never fully consenting to its rule, never adopting the dominant point of view or vocabulary as expressive of its own identity” (Leitch 2001, 2194). The term is widely used in postcolonial studies, and one of the foremost feminist critics, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak has used it to represent the natives in her postcolonial literary critiques, for example in her book *A Critique of Postcolonial Reason: Toward a History of the Vanishing Present* (1999). According to her, the subaltern has no history and no voice, and the subaltern female is even more deeply in the shadows (Spivak 1999, 274). The term is applicable to the Tasmanian Aborigines in *Dr. Wooreddy’s Prescription*, and it depicts well their attitudes towards their white oppressors. Said describes the position of the colonised as follows:

Thus the status of the colonized people has been fixed in zones of dependency and peripherality, stigmatized in the designation of underdeveloped, less-developed, developing states, ruled by a superior, developed, or metropolitan colonizer who was theoretically posited as a categorically antithetical overlord. (Said 2000, 295)

*Dr. Wooreddy's Prescription* gives a voice to colonial subaltern. Since I am going to focus on the effects colonialism had on these people, it might be wise to clarify the difference between imperialism and colonialism. I shall be using them in the same sense as Said does in his book *Culture and Imperialism* (1993). He makes the following distinction between the two terms: “(i)mperialism means the practice, the theory, and the attitudes of a dominating metropolitan centre ruling a distant territory; colonialism, which is almost always a consequence of imperialism, is the implanting of settlements on distant territory” (Said 1993, 8). Therefore, the difference between imperialism and colonialism is more like the difference between idea and practice.

As I stated in the introduction, the main theorist that I will be using in this study is Edward W. Said and his notion of contrapuntal reading. Said suggests, that because the Europeans now know that the non-Europeans did not accept the Western people overpowering them with indifference, “we must therefore read the great canonical texts, and perhaps also the entire archive of modern and pre-modern European and American culture, with an effort to draw out, extend, give emphasis and voice to what is silent or marginally present or ideologically represented (I have in mind Kipling’s Indian characters) in such works,” (Said 1993, 78). Matti Savolainen explains Said’s term, contrapuntal reading, in a more understandable way:

The contrapuntal mode of reading (or contrapuntal perspective) means that a critic juxtaposes contradictory and opposing experiences and knowledges and attempts to relate them to each other because ideologically and culturally they are, as it were, the two sides of the same phenomenon (Said 1993, 37). A contrapuntal reading takes account of both the effects of imperialism and the effects of the resistance to imperialism (ibid.79) (Savolainen 1998, 20-29).

To further simplify it, the contrapuntal mode of reading means that the reader is aware of both sides of the same story and takes them both into account.

In this section, I will start by introducing the traditional, Western history of Australia. This traditional history, or official narrative, is important to bear in mind in order to study its counter narrative in *Dr. Wooreddy's Prescription*. Following the official narrative, I shall discuss the ways it compares to the Aboriginal side of the same story (counter narrative) by using a contrapuntal mode of reading. I will focus on how *Dr. Wooreddy's Prescription* is an attempt to rewrite this traditional history, to make known the peoples and events that have often been left out of the history of Australia, and to legitimise the entire existence of Aboriginal people. Finally, I will introduce narratives of victimology and discuss how the public view of the true victims of the colonisation has changed with the times.

## 2.1 Official Narrative

The traditional history of Australia is the history of the white population of Australia. This history excludes Aborigines altogether and Australia as a historical country came into existence when European civilisation reached its shores (Attwood 1996, xii). Sir Walter Murdoch's *The Making of Australia; An Introductory History* (1917) rationalises the exclusion of the Aborigines as follows:

When people talk about 'the history of Australia' they mean the history of the white people who have lived in Australia. There is a good reason why we should not stretch the term to make it include the history of the dark-skinned wandering tribes who hurled boomerangs and ate snakes in their native land for long ages before the arrival of the first intruders from Europe...for they have nothing that can be called a history. They have dim legends, and queer fairytales, and deep-rooted customs which have come down from long, long ago; but they have no history, as we use the word. (quoted in Attwood 1996, xii)

In other words, history is for the civilised Europeans because they have significant events and progress to report. Therefore, traditional Australian history begins with Captain James Cook's account of his journey to Australian territory in 1770. At that time, the land was considered to belong to no one and thus free to be claimed for the British Crown (Brennan 2001, 132). The history continued with the first colonisers from the old continent settling to Australia.

By the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, British settlements had started to form onto Australian territory, the first in Port Jackson, north of Botany Bay (Carter 1988, xiv). David Hill's book, *1788; The Brutal Truth of the First Fleet* (2009), recounts the story of the First Fleet and the hardships they encountered on the voyage and after their arrival. Hill has written his book on the basis of historical records, letters and other written accounts. This is how he describes the conditions in Port Jackson:

For most of the convicts life in the new settlement was harsh, with poor accommodation and inadequate food that lacked nutrition. Conditions were crowded, with more than a thousand people packed into an area of little more than two square kilometres. It was little different from living in a prison; there were no bars and fences, but equally there was nowhere to go except into the seemingly endless bush. (Hill 2009, 177)

This conveys the circumstances on the settlements which were designed to function as penal colonies to accommodate prisoners from the already overcrowded prisons of Britain after the loss of the United States (Hill 2009, 7). These transported British and Irish criminals were the 'founding fathers' of the civilized Australia, until the large scale arrival of free settlers in 1850s (Oxley and Richards 2001, 16). However, since the beginning of the Australian colonisation there were also free settlers and those in charge.

The poor circumstances and near starvation on the new settlements caused troubles from the beginning of the colonisation. The troubles did not stay inside the colony. There occurred incidents where colonists died and incidents where Aboriginal

people died. These conflicts had started within a year from the arrival of the First Fleet, and the more the colony expanded so did the hostilities (Hill 2009, 165). There were multiple triggers for these conflicts. Perhaps the most important thing, that caused these problems, was food (Anderson 2001, 11). The usual staples of Aboriginal diet became scarce because of the volume with which they had to be hunted or caught to feed the settlers (Hill 2009, 172). Next, another important factor in the clashes between the two groups of people was the land (Anderson 2001, 11). The rapidly expanding colonies needed land, thus they drove the Aborigines off. Finally, sexual desire was also one of the reasons for the settlers to attack the Aborigines according to Clements (2014, 20, 49). A contributing factor to this was the enormous gender imbalance. The number of European men was six-fold compared to the number of women in the beginning of the colonisation (Clements 2014, 20, 49).

As new settlements started to form in Australia, in 1802 the King of England sent a party to claim Van Diemen's Land, or Tasmania as it is now called, to the crown (Macintyre 1999, 37). The first years on the island were equally hard to those on the main land. The settlement had to survive on game and seafood because crops failed to grow (Macintyre 1999, 37). The growing conflicts between the Europeans and the Aborigines of Tasmania culminated in the 1820's and 1830's. The colonists started to refer to the series of violent engagements as the Black War (Macintyre 1999, 61-62). The violent encounters eventually led to the almost complete eradication of the Tasmanian Aborigines. The remaining ones were gathered and relocated to a settlement on Flinders Island by George Robinson, who was commissioned by the Lieutenant-Governor Arthur (Macintyre 1999, 67-68).

G.A. Robinson started his task of rounding up the last remaining Tasmanians in 1829 (Macintyre 1999, 67-68). He was a builder in Hobart when he applied to the post of conciliator Governor Arthur advertised. In March 1839 Robinson arrived in Port Philip to head a newly formed Aboriginal Protectorate. He was the chief Protector of Aborigines until 1849, and he kept a detailed diary (Presland 1989, 9), which have provided an important glimpse to the history of white people in colonial Australia. Even more valuable, however are his observations on the Aboriginal culture. G.A Robinson befriended a few Aborigines on his first mission, including a female Aboriginal Truganini and her husband Wooraddy (Serle 1949; Ryan & Smith 1976, 305). Robinson himself was married to Maria Evans, and had five children.

Truganini was the daughter of Mangana, a chief of Bruny Island people (Ryan & Smith 1976, 305). When she met G.A. Robinson, her mother had been killed by sailors, her uncle shot by a soldier, her sister abducted by sealers, and her fiancé murdered by timber-getters (Ryan & Smith 1976, 305). She was abused sexually repeatedly. In 1830, G.A Robinson moved Truganini, her husband Wooraddy, and other surviving Aborigines to a settlement on Flinders Island in order to save them. While Robinson's original intention may have been to save Aboriginal people, many of them died there from diseases brought by European people. The Aborigines were restricted to practice their old ways, and the intention was to Christianise and civilise them. While Wooraddy's role in Aboriginal history remains somewhat obscure, he was apparently the last surviving man from Bruny Island. He died in 1842. Truganini herself died in 1876, at the age of 64. She was considered to be among the last full-blood speakers of Tasmanian language.

Although the new settlers admitted the existence of prior inhabitants on the continent, they still felt that the land belonged to them because the natives did not use it

productively (Curthoys 2005, 166-167). Furthermore, Paul Carter in his book *The Road to Botany Bay* (1987) addresses the issue of land ownership. In early maps of Australia, there is an area marked as debatable land, which was land that no one had laid claim to, or its ownership was disputed in some way. He points out that land ownership was probably an incomprehensible concept to the Aborigines, and thus the white settlers marked the Aboriginal tribal areas as land that belonged to no one, and left the land free to be settled into (Carter 1988, 136).

Paul Carter also makes a point about the phrase 'debatable land'. He says that "it reminds us that the process of settlement was not a laconic replacement of one culture by another, a mechanical imposition of superior technology, a simple, physical 'taming' of the land, but, on the contrary, a process of teaching the country to speak" (Carter 1988, 136). This means that the settlers not only invaded the country, but also, when failing to communicate with the prior inhabitants in their language, tried to adapt their own language to apply to those new and foreign things and concepts in their new homeland.

While being 'civilised', the Aborigines were banned from using their own language and from performing their traditional ceremonies. Even their own names did not suit the colonists. Paul Carter discusses the reasons for the need to give Aboriginal people new names:

But, in giving Aborigines 'English' names, naming worked quite differently [in comparison to naming places]. Names like 'Nobody' neither classified nor particularized. Their sole function was to distinguish...They were numbers, nothing more..., the early missionaries and aboriginal protectors responsible for the kind of names I have quoted were faithful servants. Their primary task was neither to convert nor to protect: it was to census. It was necessary, not only to number the Aborigines present, but, for future reference, to fix them with names. Names made them facts which could be written down time and again...Names, in short, made them white history. (Carter 1988, 331-332)

The bans and new names were part of a systematic eradication of Aboriginal culture, which comply with Raphael Lemkin's theories of cultural genocide. According



to Lemkin's theories (1944, 79), cultural genocide consists of two phases: destruction of the national pattern of the oppressed group; and the imposition of the national pattern of the oppressor. While the British officials and the government were aware of the brutalities performed by the colonists, the Crown tried to ameliorate this by funding missionary work, which consequently supported the annihilation of the last remnants of Aboriginal culture (Blackstock 2000, 71-72). Finally, the Aborigines were restricted of their own language, their names, their tradition and their land. Their extinction was even justified by the colonial government by remarking that the Aborigines would nevertheless become extinct because "the whites will individually or in small bodies take violent steps against the Aborigines" according to an official report from year 1838 (Blackstock 2000, 72).

## **2.2 Counter Narrative**

*Dr. Wooreddy's Prescription* is a fictionalised adaptation of previously documented accounts of post-invasion and people of that time. The novel is set in Tasmania around 1830s, some twenty-years after the European invasion of Tasmania. The author, Mudrooroo, deliberately re-styles earlier interpretations of the systematic British colonial genocide and focuses on the events that took place between 1829 and 1842. As I mentioned earlier, the year 1829 was when George Augustus Robinson was appointed as Conciliator and Protector of Aborigines, while 1842 was the year the last Bruny Island, Aboriginal male, Wooraddy, died.

The novel recounts the extermination of the Tasmanian Aborigines. Through the life of Wooreddy, Mudrooroo evokes the destruction of an entire people. First, they are killed violently by the whites, then as a result of the misguided efforts of their protector, G.A. Robinson. When the Aborigines realise how desperate the situation is, some of them

want to fight the whites (DW 16). Nevertheless, Wooreddy chooses to trust himself and his family under the protection of Robinson (DW 34). His solution is to offer a place of safety on Flinders Island to the remaining Aborigines. This sanctuary however, turns out to be a place where many died of diseases brought by the white people (DW 152). Once on Flinders Island, indigenous people are converted to Christianity and to European traditions. G.A. Robinson takes every measure to make the Aborigines forget their old habits and customs, and to replace them with his teachings. He has no respect for the native culture:

I order you not to fight any more, and I order you not to take off your clothing and dance away the night. Dancing is evil and worse than fighting, just as is taking off your clothing unless to wash yourselves. I have heard that night after night you have been wont to make an undignified din. I order you to stop this, but you will lose nothing for I will replace your savage wailings with singing of a grander nature. (DW 138-139)

As a final act of rebellion, Wooreddy and some other Aborigines escape to the mainland and go back to the tribal way of life (DW 184). They are soon arrested and Ummarrah is sentenced to death for revenging prior brutality:

[Trugernanna to Robinson] Fader, what will they do to us? We did nothing wrong; we were only trying to get back home! That man that was killed. Long ago he raped me. Black women can be raped too! We can feel pain and we do not kill without reason. We are not savages. (DW 202)

After the execution of Ummarrah, Wooreddy is taken back to Flinders Island. Now old and sick, he dies before reaching his place of captivity (DW 207). Trugernanna finds herself alone. The last man of Bruny Island was dead.

As I pointed out earlier, Mudrooroo has mixed historical facts with fiction, thus not only giving the reader an opportunity to locate the timeframe of the novel, but also adding a sense of reality and truth to his words while simultaneously blurring the line between fact and fiction. The author renames Woorraddy as 'Doctor Wooreddy', while George Augustus Robinson's name is left untouched. Of course, his character is only based

on the original G.A. Robinson and not an accurate portrayal of his life. Furthermore, *Mudrooroo* focuses on the tragedy of Tasmania's frontier warfare through the lives of four Aboriginal characters, Wooreddy, Ummarra, Trugernanna and Walyer. To all these four characters, a resemblance can be found in traditional history. The novel's events are in congruence with conventional history, as it tells the story of aboriginal transportation to Flinders Island and their desperate resistance during the Black War, for example.

There are numerous specific points of contact in the novel with the life and times of Robinson, whose so-called civilising mission managed only to deteriorate the position of those he was contracted to protect (Knudsen 2002). As Kerr points out, the events in the novel are based on the real diaries of George Augustus Robinson (Kerr 1988, 59). Among the very specific references to actual historical events in the novel, is the first ships sailing to form the settlement on Derwent River. This story told at the beginning of the novel sets the timeframe for the story that is about to be told, and adds a historical echo to the account. This historical counter narrative within the story offers the reader a contrapuntal version of a familiar, historically true event. *Mudrooroo* tries to give a voice for the silenced natives that have often been left out of the "official" history books:

'Then a piece of the island broke away and came crawling across the sea towards them. Our hidden grandfathers watched on. The creature touched the land. It carried pale souls which Ria Warrawah had captured. They could not bear being away from the sea and had to protect their bodies with strange skins. They spoke and the sounds were unlike any that had been heard. Our grandfathers remained hidden and after a time the creatures mounted their strange sea thing and went back to the dark island.'

This account explained the ships sailing past to form the first European settlement on the Derwent River. (DW 4)

This extract shows *Mudrooroo*'s illustration of the natives witnessing the arrival of white men to their island. The Aborigines in the novel had never seen white people before which led them to the conclusion that they must be souls of the dead, and therefore evil. In

contrast, most white people considered the Aborigines as subhuman: “‘Almost human, ain’t they,’ the soldiers said ‘a musket ball’ll round them up a lot quicker and better’ [...] ‘They’re just a bunch of savages, good for nothing but mischief’” (DW 80).

However, there are exemptions. G.A. Robinson, despite his condescending attitude towards the natives, still sees them as human beings, although child-like. He is not portrayed as a bad man in the novel, only ignorant and self-important (DW 97). He is a man with an interest in protecting the remaining Aborigines:

The wretched people had a right to their land, didn’t they? No they had no longer such a right. They had to be collected together and taken to a place of safety. ... He continued to ponder and agonise over the wretched inhabitants of the island and the crimes committed against them – and too often by those who prided themselves on being considered “Christian”! The Aborigines must be protected at all cost! (DW 99)

His intentions, however, can be questioned. Sarah Gensburger (2011, 3) states that ‘Only rescues that were selflessly motivated – not prompted by desire for payment, religious conversion, the adoption of child and so on – may be nominated “Righteous among the nations”’. Robinson himself is convinced that he is on God’s business, but his real goal is to find fame and glory for himself by civilising as many Aborigines as he possibly can so that he would not have to go back to England as a mere bricklayer he was before (DW 32). He takes every measure in the story to make the Aborigines forget their old habits and customs, and to replace them with his teachings. He has no respect for the native culture:

I order you not to fight any more, and I order you not to take off your clothing and dance away the night. Dancing is evil and worse than fighting, just as is taking off your clothing unless to wash yourselves. I have heard that night after night you have been wont to make an undignified din. I order you to stop this, but you will lose nothing for I will replace your savage wailings with singing of a grander nature. (DW 138-139)

Furthermore, Robinson's worldview is extremely dualistic in a way that he firmly believes that the Western way of doing things is the only correct one. He is of the opinion that he alone knows what is best for the Aborigines:

Robinson broke into the conversation because he did not like Aborigines and settlers conversing together. He alone knew what was good for them and he alone could feel the pain of the sufferings they had endured at the hands of the persons like the one on the boat. (DW 122-123)

There are multiple ways the Aborigines are civilised in the novel. White people try to make the Aborigines look more like Western people, impose their culture and habits. They are brought unfamiliar food (i.e. white flour and tea) and tobacco (DW 23-25). Clothes were a foreign concept to the Aborigines before the European settlers insisted on the natives being clothed (DW 34). One of the tribe elders, Mangana, perceives clothing as something that will protect the natives from being killed:

He wore over his body a large soft skin which had been given to Trugernanna. He wore this as a sign of surrender and urged Wooreddy to do the same. The *num* were provoked by a naked body so much so [sic] that they often killed it. (DW 25)

In his attempt to make the Aborigines as European as possible, Robinson goes so far that he changes the names of the Aborigines (DW 139). This again reveals his attitude towards the natives whom he considers to be greatly inferior to him. Oddly enough, when Robinson starts to re-name them, he does not give them proper Christian names but names that sound more like those of a pet animal or an invented character. Wooreddy becomes Count Alpha and Trugernanna Lalla Rookh (Lalla Rookh is a character in Thomas Moore's oriental romance of the same name). The natives are too numb to care what they are called at this point: "In his numbness he [Wooreddy] did not care if he was renamed Mister Brown" (DW 139). It seems futile to change their names from Aboriginal ones to other foreign sounding ones, yet Robinson is very pleased with himself after the naming process, and he feels he has given them beautiful names that reflect their individual

personalities: “You, the most beautiful princess of all your race, I name you Lalla Rookh!” (DW 139). As I already mentioned in the beginning of chapter two, Paul Carter points out that re-naming the Aborigines served the purpose of census, and with the name they were made part of white history (Carter 1988, 331-332). The Aborigines had very little left of their old identity besides their names, and the white man took those away as well. The Aborigines were “claimed” to the crown very much the same way as their land was.

It is insinuated in *Dr. Wooreddy's Prescription* that the new names of the Aborigines might serve a humorous purpose, as well. When G.A. Robinson shows Governor Arthur a list of natives, on which there are names such as King George and Robinson George, the narrator remarks how Governor Arthur fails to find it amusing: “Arthur was renowned for his lack of humour and it was proved again on this occasion. Not a strain of a smile intruded on his rock-hard features” (DW 168). But what is left untold, is whether G.A. Robinson has made the list deliberately comical or is it only amusing for the omniscient narrator.

However good his intention was to save the remaining Aborigines by gathering them to Flinders Island, it eventually failed miserably. Robinson takes comfort in the thought that, although he failed to save their bodies, he did Christianise them and thus save their souls (DW 40) Watching a group of Aborigines attending a funeral of one of their friends, the Protector is rather pleased with himself:

At their head strode Mr. Clark, the Catechist, with bible in his hand. Robinson thrilled. His departed sable friend was enjoying a Christian burial. At least that side has not been neglected ... Cheerily he left the cemetery and approached the side of the projected chapel. (DW 134-135)

Spirituality and religion are present throughout the story. The novel offers the reader an insight into aboriginal spiritual world by disclosing various beliefs and myths, such as the story of creation, for example. In the novel, Wooreddy goes through a rite of passage into adulthood during which the tribe elders tell him a story of the beginning of the world (DW 5-7). The Aboriginals have their own counterparts of God and the Devil, Great Ancestor and Ria Warrawah, respectively. Ria Warrawah lives in the ocean, and all evil originates from it. Great Ancestor, on the other hand, is their benevolent god figure living in the sky (DW 5-6). Their prayers to Great Ancestor are in the form of magic spells and chants which give them protection from Ria Warrawah (DW 5-6). The aforementioned stories of the coming of the first settlers and the creation are both embedded in the novel to work as a counter narrative to their Western versions.

### **2.3 Narrative of Victimology and an Attempt to Rewrite History**

Only after the 1960s the Aboriginals have been considered as the true victims in Australia's colonisation. This late recognition has certainly had an impact on how the Aboriginals have been portrayed in postcolonial literature. Mudrooroo, originally known as Colin Johnson wrote *Dr. Wooreddy's Prescription* in the 1980s, at the emergence of Aboriginal history (Curthoys 2005, 168). Quite a while after the publication of the novel, in 1988, Colin Johnson adopted the Aboriginal name, Mudrooroo, thus claiming an Aboriginal identity for himself (Fisher 2000, 95).

Postcolonial Australia has seen many shifts in historical focus before the present day, and the changes in the narrative of victimology reflect prevalent attitudes in society. Natives were often left out of official histories altogether or only mentioned briefly in one or two sentences. A good example of this is found in a book edited by Gordon Greenwood

called *Australia: A Social and Political History* (1955). The first chapter concerns the discovery and founding of Australia, beginning with James Cook's arrival to New South Wales. Aborigines' role in the history is described as follows:

Despite a few violent encounters the natives, however, never seriously impeded colonization. They were few in number and not until The Blue Mountains to the west of Sydney had been crossed and the sheep farmers had fanned out to the west and the south in search of new grazing land were the prior occupancy rights of the natives greatly jeopardized. (Crowley 1955, 7)

Yet surprisingly, this historian acknowledges the prior occupancy rights of the natives, which were not widely recognised in the 1950s. In the 19th century, the Aborigines were hardly considered to be of the human race, at all. An excellent example of this can be found in H.G. Wells' famous novel *The War of the Worlds*, which was first published in 1898:

We must remember what ruthless and utter destruction our own species has wrought, not only upon animals such as the vanished bison and dodo, but also upon its own inferior races. The Tasmanians, in spite of their human likeness, were entirely swept out of existence in a war of extermination waged by European immigrants, in the space of fifty years. (Wells 2003, 9)

He does not compare the Tasmanians to animals but, at the same time, does not admit them to be as human as the white Europeans.

It was common in the 1950s that convicts were perceived as the true victims of imperial politics and the colonisation of Australia (Attwood 1996, xv). This kind of historical narrative focuses on the hardships and sufferings of the exiled convicts, and their inhumane treatment. However, before the convicts were seen as victims, they were perceived being hardly more human than the Aborigines. Paul Carter gives an example of a few writers who reported of the journey of the First Fleet, namely Watkin Tench, Capt. Arthur Phillip, David Collins, John Hunter, and John White, who all deemed the convicts little superior to the natives in intellect and morals (Carter 1988, 295). Although,



considering the lack of humanity they displayed towards the natives, many of the convicts did very little to deserve better treatment.

Later on, the narrative of victimology continues with *pioneer narratives*. Their focus was on the struggle to survive in a hostile land, where the farmers who came from Britain did not know how to cultivate the foreign land and therefore had trouble in growing enough food for themselves (Curthoys 2005, 167).

It was not until the late 1960s when the Aborigines started to receive recognition as the true victims in the colonisation of Australia. There emerged a new historical narrative, which could be called the new Australian history (Attwood 1996, xv). It was formulated to break what Attwood calls the great Australian silence, meaning the years of denying the sufferings of the Aborigines and the atrocities the colonisers were guilty of. Another historical narrative, the Aboriginal history, arose in the 1980s. This kind of narrative was often in the form of autobiography, biography, family story and oral histories, and not in the form of what might be perceived as traditional historical narratives (Curthoys 2005, 168). The Aborigines started to make claim for a history which they were denied in traditional historical narratives. They have achieved this by tracing their roots, re-establishing their kin relationships and claiming “traditional” land (Attwood 1996, xxii). Although the present situation in Australia is still not stable, and the position of the Aborigines is yet to be firmly established, the awareness of Aboriginal past is increasing steadily.

In a manner typical of indigenous postcolonial literature, *Dr. Wooreddy's Prescription* blurs the line between the traditional history and fiction. According to Linda Hutcheon, one might argue that history and fiction are both narratives and as such they have both been fabricated by someone (Hutcheon 1988, 108). In other words, historical

narratives are not the absolute truth, but someone's truth (Hutcheon 1988, 108-113). *Dr. Wooreddy's Prescription* is an attempt to rewrite history, to make known the peoples and events that have traditionally been left out of the history of Australia, but also to 'legitimise' the entire existence of Aboriginal people. Mudrooroo himself has said:

Aboriginal writers are not content with only writing about a past separate from their present being. The past is there only to explain the present and postulate ideals for the future. Still, the past is of the utmost importance in that it is there that true Aboriginality lies. (Attwood 1996, xix)

Graham Huggan argues in his book, *Australian Literature – Postcolonialism, Racism, Transnationalism* (2007) that *Dr Wooreddy's Prescription* is actually an anti-historical novel in a sense that it struggles throughout the story to "de-authenticate the white historical discourses within which it is written and within whose space it is forced to co-exist" (Huggan 2007, 70). In that sense, Mudrooroo is not only rewriting history from another perspective, but questioning the reliability of the existing histories that the Western people have written, read and trusted for decades.

One way of rewriting history is to make void popular myths. In *Dr. Wooreddy's Prescription*, Mudrooroo is addressing two myths: Social Darwinism and *terra nullius*. One of the uses of the ideology of Social Darwinism emphasises the differences between the colonisers and the colonised. The ideology is based on Charles Darwin's *The Origin of Species* and it exploits the notion of 'survival of the fittest'. Darwin himself, however, had very little to do with the different versions of his original theory which only pertained to animals (Degler 1992, 11). Social Darwinism grades different human races into a hierarchy, on top of which are the white Europeans and the Aborigines and other people of different colour were savages and therefore on the other end of the hierarchy. This theory, of course, justified racial violence. In literature, the myth was kept alive by referring to indigenous people as 'savages', 'dying race' or 'child-like', with any term

that emphasises their inferiority in comparison with the white man. Mudrooroo is making this myth void by reversing the roles. In his novel, the Aborigines are cultured and civilised, and they observe the white men as objects of curiosity. They are referred to as ghosts, not humans. They are crude and brutally violent, unlike the Aborigines who only resort to violence in their own defence.

The other common myth Mudrooroo is addressing, is the myth of *terra nullius*. This means a land belonging to no one, as I already briefly mentioned in the introduction. Colonial explorers widely exploited this belief and ignored the indigenous peoples of the places they discovered. If a country did not already belong to colonial Europe it belonged to no one, and therefore it was free to be claimed by which ever empire that got there first. Stuart Macintyre writes as follows:

The British authorities took possession of New South Wales according to the doctrine, derived from international law, that it was *terra nullius*, land belonging to nobody. A territory might be acquired by conquest, consent or original occupation...From their [Captain Cook and Joseph Banks] observations along the east coast in 1770, he and Banks judged that the Aborigines were few in number, mere nomadic inhabitants rather than proprietors. (Macintyre 1999, 34)

In *Dr. Wooreddy's Prescription*, Mudrooroo is deconstructing this myth by describing a situation very far from *terra nullius*. He is disclosing cultural values and systems among the Aborigines, values that were already there long before the Europeans settled on Tasmanian soil. They had an established structure of administration, kinship, concept of marriage, their own religion and other social lore. All these together compose a strong counter-argument to Australia and Tasmania being no man's land before the first colonial settlers.

Surely Mudrooroo is not the only indigenous writer who is deconstructing the popular myths discussed above, and in doing so attempting to rewrite existing history. But does it mean that they write only for the dominant society to recognise their

existence? Joanne Tompkins (1990, 485) argues that indigenous writers explore their pasts for their own people, and not only to reveal their culture to a white readership. She, furthermore, emphasises the importance of history to indigenous postcolonial authors: “To indigenous postcolonial literature, history becomes a central political concern because history denies colonized peoples both a past and a viable present” (Tompkins 1990, 484). Elaine Lindsay and John Murray (1997-1998, 94-102) use the term national self-discovery addressing the same phenomenon. National self-discovery is a crucial reason for the on-going efforts to create an Aboriginal history in Australia, which is branding the social and political atmosphere of contemporary Australia.

### 3 Dr. Wooreddy's Testimony vs. "White" History

Postmodern theory and art are challenging the familiar division into the literary and the historical by blurring the lines of the two modes of writing, and concentrating on the similarities rather than the differences between history and fiction (White 1976, 25). Before the rise of the so-called scientific history, literature and history as disciplines were deemed to share many similar characteristics and were considered to belong to the same tree of learning (Hutcheon 1988, 105).

Now, in the recent decades, there is again a definite increase in the popularity of a historical novel, an increase which can be clearly seen in many recent Australian novels. As I already pointed out in the introduction, Mudrooroo's three novels, *Long Live Sandawarra* (1979), *Dr. Wooreddy's Prescription* (1983) and *Master of the Ghost Dreaming* (1991) form "a nucleus around which a tradition of Aboriginal historical fiction developed" (Toorn 2000, 34-39). Aboriginal historical fiction is targeting the white, often one-sided history of Australia, by focusing attention to Aboriginal experience of well-known historical events, and thus contesting and questioning the predominant history. Consequently, Mudrooroo takes part in the postcolonial tradition of "writing back", like many indigenous writers do, and reading *Dr Wooreddy's Prescription* in this way is a valid way to interpret the novel (Wilson 2009, 20).

In the following section and subsections, I will discuss the way historiographic metafiction as the chosen genre enhances the novel's atmosphere of historical accuracy and reliability, and how it makes the reader aware of the official history while reading a counter narrative to it, in keeping with the original idea of contrapuntality. I shall also consider if Mudrooroo takes part in postcolonial practice of lamenting in advance the future extinction of the Tasmanians, and if, in fact, the subgenre of the novel is proleptic

elegy. Then I will focus on Wooreddy's personal experiences, his role as a witness of the Aboriginal tragedy and how Mudrooroo illustrated Wooreddy as a person with a scientific analytic interest to culture and language of the white people, which again is addressing the myth of terra nullius.

Finally, I will emphasise that this novel is about resistance. The language, genre, myths and the story itself are all examples of methods with which Mudrooroo is trying to resist the extinction of Aboriginal culture. While in some sense the novel can be considered as a eulogy to late Tasmanians, it is also a way to announce that Aboriginal culture is still present, and it has shaped modern Australia in many ways.

### **3.1 Historiographic Metafiction, Irony and Proleptic Elegy**

Linda Hutcheon describes historiographic metafiction in her book *A Poetics of Postmodernism: History, Theory, Fiction* (1988): "Like those recent theories of both history and fiction, this kind of novel asks us to recall that history and fiction are themselves historical terms and that their definitions and interrelations are historically determined and vary with time" (Hutcheon 1988, 105). In other words, she reminds us of the similarities rather than the differences between history and fiction. Hutcheon lists five different types of novels that narrate the past. The division into first three of these was originally made by Umberto Eco, and they are the romance, the swashbuckling tale and the historical novel. To these three, Hutcheon adds historiographic metafiction and non-fictional novel, also called New Journalism (Hutcheon 1988, 113).

The difference between a historical novel and historiographic metafiction is somewhat obscure. Linda Hutcheon (1988,113) claims that the main element which distinguishes historiographic metafiction from historical novel is its self-consciousness

about the way it is done. Georg Lukács' definition (1962), of the historical novel has been very influential amongst the critics in this area of study, therefore as Hutcheon states, it is impossible to overlook (Hutcheon 1988, 113). Lukács (1962, 39) has found three key elements that are, in his opinion, common for all historical novels. Firstly, the historical novel should create a microcosm which generalises and concentrates at the same time. This can be seen by focusing on the main characters, who are usually archetypes representing common people (Hutcheon 1988, 113). This is also a valid point in *Dr. Wooreddy's Prescription*, in my opinion. Wooreddy is this kind of archetypal character. He is a normal Aboriginal man, a realistic person with no unusual heroic qualities. He is even made fun of because of his funny walk which again adds a realistic imperfection to his character.

Lukács' second point is that the use of detail is relatively unimportant in historical novels (Lukács 1962, 59). The truth and accuracy of the details used is immaterial. Historical novel attempts to incorporate and assimilate historical details and data (Hutcheon 1988, 114). Here *Dr. Wooreddy's Prescription* differs from historical novels. The accuracy of the details is in fact important in this case. Mudrooroo is trying to make history known from the perspective of 'the other', and therefore the right context is significant.

The third defining aspect for the historical novel, according to Lukács, is the tendency to put real historical personages to secondary roles (Lukács 1962, 42). They are used in order to make the fictional world more authentic and valid (Hutcheon 1988, 114). And once again, this applies to *Dr. Wooreddy's Prescription* because Mudrooroo has based majority of his characters on historical persons with slight alterations to their names in some cases, for example Truganini is renamed Trugernanna.

Although the differences between historical fiction and historiographic metafiction are difficult to define, Linda Hutcheon has nevertheless provided us a few distinctions on the basis of Georg Lukács' definition of a historical novel. The first clear distinction is in the protagonists. Whereas the main characters in historical novels are certain types, in historiographic metafiction they are the absolute opposite. They are the ex-centrics and the marginalised (Hutcheon 1988, 114). They are the people who have not had their voices heard in the (fictional) history books. The second difference Hutcheon establishes between historiographic metafiction and historical novel lies in the details used (Hutcheon 1988, 114). Whereas details are relatively unimportant to historical novels, historiographic metafiction, on the other hand, might falsify known historical facts on purpose. Furthermore, when details are used, they are incorporated in the novel but not assimilated as they are in historical novels. Hutcheon elaborates this by giving an example of a narrator (in Michael Ondaatje's novel *Running in the Family*) that readers can witness collecting historical facts and then trying to make sense of them. According to Hutcheon, "historiographic metafiction acknowledges the paradox of the *reality* of the past but its *textualized accessibility* to us today" (Hutcheon 1988, 114).

In order to link the novel's events to more recent history and to seek validation to calling the systematic eradication of the Tasmanians a genocide, Mudrooroo has used the term 'final solution', *die Endlösung*. Die Endlösung is a term in German used to describe the Nazi policy of rounding up all Jewish people together and systematically killing them (Royde-Smith 2017). In *Dr. Wooreddy's Prescription*, George Augustus Robinson has taken up the task of collecting all Aborigines he can find, and persuading them to follow him to this new "promise land" (DW 160). However, this settlement on Flinders Island which was appointed to the Aborigines turn out to be nothing more than a death camp.



Lack of hygiene and new diseases were killing majority of the people on Flinders Island. The settlement is often referred to in the novel as the island of the dead, or home of death: “This island is an island of the dead and the sooner we’re all dead, the better off we’ll be” (DW 152).

The irony of it all is, that Robinson never intended on leading his party of Aborigines to their graves. He considered himself to be on a mission from God, and the Aborigines were his pilgrims wandering towards Christianity: “Indeed, they were in a strange, desolate land, but on the Lord’s work! He exulted in his new self-imposed title, as he led his little band of pilgrims into the jungle” (DW 65). While Robinson is performing his Christian duty, the remaining Aborigines in other parts of the island, who refuse to surrender to the white oppressors, are being systematically hunted down and killed. A man called ‘Punch’ describes the situation to G.A. Robinson: “They settled the trouble in this district long ago and they’re going to settle it in the same ways elsewhere. Why, the whole area is in an uproar with the military operation getting underway. That’ll be the final solution, that will. It’s what we did here and it worked” (DW 123). The holocaust reference here is obvious.

In addition to historiographic metafiction, this novel is an example of proleptic elegy, which according to Patrick Brantlinger (2003, 4) is typical of postcolonial literature. Proleptic elegy refers to a subgenre, in which the author is mourning the passing of the Aborigines before they were even lost. This kind of lament became common during the nineteenth-century in Anglo-Saxon settler colonies, where it “aestheticized and naturalized the disappearance of indigenous people” (Duncan 2014, 171). As the extinction of the Aborigines in this novel is supposedly inevitable from the beginning of the story, it allows the type of lament to flourish.

Rohan Wilson has criticised Mudrooroo on the basis of Brantlinger's theories for gazing into the past in order to reconstruct the lives of the Aborigines, all the while assuming that the Aborigines were doomed, as did the colonists (Wilson 2009, 20). He argues that Mudrooroo is therefore, inadvertently questioning the present day legitimacy and authenticity of Aboriginal identity. He is guilty of participating in the colonial thought according to which the Tasmanians and their culture is lost. Wilson argues, that because Mudrooroo is not of Tasmanian Aboriginal descent, his portrayal of these Aborigines is one of an outsider. Therefore, this depiction of the Tasmanians as a doomed race must be studied in the context of the wider colonial interest in extinction (Wilson 2009, 20). He goes on in his argument that "if the Aboriginal subaltern is created, maintained, and represented by academic knowledge, then we find in Mudrooroo's novel a representation that mimics one of the actual modes of colonial dominance; the construction of Aboriginality as doomed" (Wilson 2009, 25). According to him, *Dr Wooreddy's Prescription* is an example of how "the extinction discourse continues to organise the thoughts of contemporary writers" (Wilson 2009, 24). Wilson's argument is, in my opinion, an illustration of contrapuntal reading of Mudrooroo's novel. He acknowledges the underlying influence of colonialism on a narrative that seeks to tell the story from the Tasmanian's point of view.

### **3.2 Dr. Wooreddy's Mode of Analysis**

As David Kerr points out, the events in the novel are based on the real diaries of George Augustus Robinson (Kerr 1988, 59). By incorporating actual historical characters and events, Mudrooroo attempts to tell the subaltern side of the story. The whole novel is about Wooreddy and how he experiences colonisation. At the very beginning of the novel

he is set apart by a curious incident at the beach (DW 3). He interprets it as a bad omen and comes to the conclusion that the world is coming to an end:

Nothing from this time on could ever be the same – and why? Because the world was ending! ... One day, sooner rather than later, the land would begin to fragment into smaller and smaller pieces. Clouds of fog would rise from the sea to hide what was taking place from the Great Ancestor. Then the pieces holding the last survivors of the human race would be towed out to sea where they would either drown or starve. ... The boy stood in a trance and learnt that he would live on to witness the end. He had been chosen and would endure through the power of his Truth. (DW 4)

Wooreddy becomes certain that he is to be a witness to that ending, and it is made quite clear to the readers that his account of the events will be the truth; after all he is a witness and therefore must be telling the truth.

From the beginning of the novel it is obvious, that Wooreddy is ‘the key witness’ to the Aboriginal genocide. Consequently, the novel can be considered as the main character’s testimony of what occurred. By using terminology such as ‘witness’, for example, Mudrooroo is implying truthfulness and adding credibility to the story. The author emphasises to us that historical facts are not the absolute truth but someone’s truth, as I already stated above.

Wooreddy has an analytic approach to the arrival of the Europeans. He gathers evidence and information on his enemies, but also on the customs and beliefs of other tribes. Wooreddy himself uses verbs like ‘question’ and ‘investigate’ therefore adding to the impression of credibility and legality: “The good doctor decided to use the short voyage (and to keep his mind off the sea) by learning all he could about the ghosts from Ummarrah. He questioned him about the social structures of the num” (DW 61).

Another appropriate quote describes Wooreddy and Trugernanna as spies in G.A. Robinson’s household: “Wooreddy and Trugernanna had been taken into his household

as underservants, and were careful to do enough work to keep themselves there. They were the eyes and ears of the Aboriginal community [...]" (DW 149).

Wooreddy's character is very trust-evoking. He is referred to as "the good doctor" and his people turn to him for advice. He is portrayed as being thoughtful, considering and fair but also somewhat manipulative. He repeatedly convinces people to do his bidding. He uses his persuading skills to induce other Aborigines to follow G.A. Robinson because it serves his purpose at the time:

'The way I see it, is that the only logical thing to do is to go and see the ghost we call Ballawine, and hear what he has to say. In that way you will be able to come to a correct decision. Just think, a place of our own where we can be ourselves again.' (DW 118)

His intentions, however, are not malicious in any way. He does what he genuinely thinks is best in order to survive and for as many Aborigines to stay alive, as well. While he is trying to convince other Aborigines to follow G.A. Robinson, he is also seeking to establish some kind of peace between the colonisers and the colonised. He is constantly striving to understand people that are different from him or have different beliefs or customs. Thus in a way, Wooreddy is a diplomat because of his negotiating skills. In addition to being trustworthy and diplomatic, Wooreddy is also characterised as serious and even brooding. This is how Trugernanna describes her husband to her sister: "'He thinks these great big thoughts which weigh down his head so that he can never look up at the sky'" (DW 103).

While the key character is Wooreddy, the novel is narrated by an omniscient voice. Yet, the narrator always seems a little partial to Wooreddy. His thoughts and feelings are in the centre of focus, and often it even feels as if you are watching the events through Wooreddy's eyes while the narrator is merely a medium to convey all that Wooreddy is seeing. However, there is a noticeable shift in the focus towards the end of the novel.

Wooreddy is suffering from senile dementia and is losing his mental faculties. That is at least how G.A. Robinson explains Wooreddy's behaviour.

In my opinion, Wooreddy loses all hope in the end and ceases to care. There is a recurring word in the novel which is often used in describing Wooreddy and the other Aborigines: listless. Wooreddy is becoming increasingly listless as the novel progresses and shows therefore very little interest in what happens around him. As he is slowly sinking into inertia, the narrator focuses on him less and less. This may be because he is turning into an unreliable witness. He does not observe his surroundings anymore nor cares what happens to him. Before all this, Wooreddy is often said to observe his surroundings like a scientist. This gives him authority to relate the events truthfully, to give us a kind of testimony until he becomes preoccupied.

### **3.3 Forms of Resistance: Language, Ceremony and Myth**

Language is a frequently addressed question in postcolonial studies. The colonisers usually imposed their own language onto the colonised peoples, and native tongues were often forbidden entirely. The language of the colonisers becomes the norm, and other variants are pushed into the margins (Ascroft, Griffiths & Tiffin 2002, 7). The overall cultural shift towards the dominant centre is executed in a variety of ways, and in addition to the abolition of the original language, it includes restrictions on traditional practices and the destruction of religious institutions (Lemkin 1944, 79). Ngugi wa Thiong'o, a writer from Kenya, who was originally writing in English but is now working in his native language, points out that "language and culture are inseparable, and that therefore the loss of the former results in the loss of the latter" (Ngugi wa Thiong'o 1986, 195).

Consequently, the imposition of Western languages has caused a similar counter reaction in many postcolonial writers and activists who are now promoting a return to indigenous languages. Others see the language of the coloniser as a more practical alternative, and by using the dominant language they increase communication and reach a wider public. Salman Rushdie, for example, is of the opinion that “working in New Englishes can be a therapeutic act of resistance, remaking a colonial language to reflect the postcolonial experience” (Rushdie 1992). In the essay, “Imaginary Homelands” he explains that, English language is not something that can be ignored or discarded, it is the realm in which writers must solve the problems that oppose new or recently independent colonies:

Those of us who do use English do so in spite of our ambiguity towards it, or perhaps because of that, perhaps because we can find in that linguistic struggle a reflection of other struggles taking place in the real world, struggles between the cultures within ourselves and the influences at work upon our societies. To conquer English may be to complete the process of making ourselves free. (Rushdie 1992, 17)

As Australian Aboriginal literature has fought its way on the Western literary map, it has constantly faced with the same problem on how to describe aboriginal identity through Western medium of writing. Mudrooroo for instance, insist on keeping the Aboriginal writing pure in form, language and content. He has criticised many fringe (a word used especially in Aboriginal context meaning borderline or outside the centre) writers that they borrow too much from the dominant culture and lose the essence of Dreamtime (age of mythical Australia) in the process (Knudsen 1991, 2). This attempt to hold onto the Aboriginal myths can be seen very clearly in *Dr. Wooredy's Prescription* from the reoccurring words in Bruny and telling of the ancient legends (i.e. the story of the birth of the nation) (DW 5-7, 195-196).

As pure in form and language Mudrooroo wishes to be, it would be impossible to write the novel completely in Bruny language. That way he never would have reached a wider public. Therefore, he has had to contend with Western form of writing. Although he uses Standard English in the novel, he also introduces many words in Bruny language, the language spoken in Wooreddy's tribe. Eva Rask Knudsen (1991, 2) states that it is exactly the hybrid form, a mixture of Western writing and Aboriginal culture that makes aboriginal fringe writing unique. This is important in understanding *Dr. Wooreddy's Prescription*. An essential part of how Mudrooroo reveals the Aboriginal customs and modes of thinking is the employment of traditional songs. Some of these verses were written in Bruny language and others in Standard English for the public to understand. To give an example of such a song, this takes place on the settlement in Flinders Island when natives from different parts of Tasmania meet, and communicate to each other about their cultures:

Nena taypa rayna poonya, nena taypa rayna poonya,  
 nena taypa rayna poonya!  
 Nena nawra pewyllah, pallah, nawra pewyllah,  
 Pellawah, pellawah!  
 Nena nawra pewyllah, pallah nawra pewyllah,  
 Pellawah, pellawah!  
 Next the master of ceremonies began slowly thumping the palm of his hands upon the ground. ... Wooreddy began to sing:  
 The pigeon sits in the cider tree;  
 He sits in the cider tree sorting the seeds;  
 Letting the best fall one by one into the hollow,  
 Into the hollow, filling the hollow, waiting for  
 The rain, the rain to come, to come to touch the seeds.  
 Ummarraah imitated the pigeon pecking at the seeds and letting them fall into the hollow.  
 (DW 160).

These alterations between English and Bruny reflect, in Joanne Tompkins view (1990, 493), the changing of times, and the efforts of the Aborigines to hold onto their old traditions and customs.

Mudrooroo also gives examples of Western hymns that George Robinson, the Christian missionary sings to the natives in his attempt to turn them into decent Christians:

Awake our souls! Away, our fears!  
Let every trembling thought be gone!  
Awake, and run the heavenly race,  
And put a cheerful courage on. (DW 75)

The inclusion of these hymns allows comparison with the Aboriginal ones. The reader is able to see whether or not there are similarities in themes or situations they are sung in.

While the hybridisation of language may be typical of fringe literature, not everyone agrees with Knudsen about the hybrid form these types of novels employ. It has been questioned by critics who resist that kind of postmodernity. They refuse hybridity “in the name of a postcolonialism which strategically seeks to hold such ‘happy hybridisation’ at bay in the name of difference, otherness and the need to maintain rage against imperial atrocities” (McCredden 1999, 8). However, Edward Said is of the opinion that “partly because of empire, all cultures are involved in one another; none is single and pure, all are hybrid, heterogeneous, extraordinarily differentiated, and unmonolithic” (Said 1993, xxix). It is, therefore, better to embrace the hybrid form writing because it stems from a hybrid culture.

Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths and Helen Tiffin address the question of mixing languages in postcolonial writing in their book, *The Empire Writes Back* (2002) by stating that it also has a metonymic function within the text. According to them, writers use language variants to signify difference, but at the same time, they are using the language of ‘the centre’ in order to be understood. Language variants, for example an occasional word from the mother tongue embedded in the text, act as a metonym for cultural difference, which English words are inadequate to convey (Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin



2002, 52). Again, this is certainly applicable to *Dr. Wooreddy's Prescription* in which language variants are used throughout the novel to highlight differences:

The child answered in a similar dead voice: Three ghosts came rowing into the bay. They took the first and second sister away. ... Num come; they see what they want; they take it. It is their way... When we first saw them, we talked about them and decided that they were spirits of the dead returning. Soon we found that they were not our dead, but perhaps those of our enemies. They were under the dominion of the Evil One, Ria Warrawah. (DW 11)

There are a few key words in Bruny language Mudrooroo is using throughout the novel.

As already shown in the extract above, the white people are referred to with a Bruny word *num* (ghost) because of their pale skin. Aboriginal people, on the other hand, are being referred to as humans. This may be in response to Imperial and colonial literatures where the natives were often reduced to animals or to something inhuman. Moreover, Joanne Tompkins raises an interesting point in her essay regarding the word *num*, and recurrence of the English word 'numb' (Tompkins 1990, 494). She discusses the natives' transformation into Westerners with the clothes they are made to wear. The word 'numb' is often used to describe the natives as they become more and more like the ghosts: insensitive and lacking in feeling. "Doctor Wooreddy donned his cloak of numbness and observed the scene with all the detachment of a scientist" (DW 20). Towards the end of the novel Wooreddy also becomes "dumb", or as it is portrayed in the book, senile (DW 202). This might be an addition to the *num*/numb-wordplay so that at the same time as Wooreddy becomes more like the *num* and goes numb, he also becomes dull-witted or dumb, which again might act as a survival strategy or a sign of surrender, just like the numbness. Right at the end of the novel, Wooreddy and Ummarrah are imprisoned for killing two white men. Even though Wooreddy planned the attack and understood what he was doing, suddenly in prison he no longer comprehends anything at all (DW 202).

This is the reason he avoids a death by hanging which Ummarrah suffers. It seems that one has to be either numb or dumb or both in order to survive in the white people's world.

As the cultural annihilation in the novel proceeds, Wooreddy makes remarks about how many English words have infiltrated their language, and how many Western customs have replaced their own. As their way of resisting this, they keep their true ceremonies to themselves, thus preventing the whites from using their intimate forms of spirituality as a simple commodity on display for their entertainment:

‘We are the master’s of any ceremonies here. But we are doing only rubbish dancing today, just for the white fellows. When we dance the proper fashion it is a joy to behold. ... ‘We decorate our bodies differently, ... We emphasize our degrees of initiation more.’ (DW 180, 182)

Nevertheless, the dominant language inevitably replaces the original language of the Aborigines. Even Aborigines from different tribes converse in English towards the end of the novel in order to understand each other better: “Wooreddy and Ummarrah re-introduced themselves, this time using English, the common medium” (DW 180). Although Bruny words become sparse towards the end of the novel while English gains more ground, in the beginning of the novel, Bruny language is described as complex and full of intricacies. For example, when Wooreddy is trying to communicate with G.A. Robinson, he must make a tremendous effort to simplify his mother tongue so that the white man can understand what he says:

Woodreddy replied as best he could in a mixture of Bruny and Ghost. He was stripping his language down to the base essentials in order to be understood. All the honorifics, family designations and different grammatical constructions he would have used in conversing with a person belonging to the highly stratified Bruny society were unnecessary. The result sounded barbaric in his ears, but it did serve the purpose he had designed it for. (DW 34-35)

With this Mudrooroo implies that the language and social organisation of the Aborigines were contrary to what white invaders think rather more complex and elaborate than they

believed. The attention to language is one of Mudrooroo's methods of resistance; it is one of the ways he deconstructs social Darwinism, as well. The consideration language receives in the novel makes the reader well aware of it, which must be the purpose of the author. It becomes evident on multiple occasions in addition to this one: "Wooredy wondered if the ghosts had honorifics and specific forms of address. Perhaps it was not even a real language? – but then each and every species of animal had a language, and so it must be!" (DW 21).

Cultural defenders, such as Mudrooroo, rationalise their counteractions with the importance of cultural diversity. With cultural protection they try to shield a fragile system from foreign influences (Pager 2011, 71). Mudrooroo's own personal actions, such as changing his original name, Colin Johnson, to an Aboriginal name and writing novels from indigenous peoples' point of view, can be seen as cultural defending, although some controversy does exist. For example, the way he proleptically eulogises Aboriginal culture, deeming it inevitably lost, and takes, perhaps unwittingly, part in colonial tradition of naturalising the fate of indigenous peoples.

Inevitably, the novel ends in a situation where the Aborigines will never be able to recover their ancient culture as it was before being contaminated and destroyed by the white invaders. They have finally deprived the Aborigines of everything: their land, their families, their dignity, their innocence, their language and their culture. And the Aborigines are very much aware of it, but can do nothing against the overwhelming superiority of colonisers. Woodreddy's initial prophecy seems therefore to have come a full circle; the world as they knew it came to an end. Right at the end of the novel, when Ummarrah is facing his death sentence for killing two white men, he gives up (DW 202-

204). Finally, the last defiant Aborigine gives up the resistance, and meets his predestined end as if by his own choice:

[Ummarrah to other Aborigines] Cheer up, It's no fun living in a white man's world. I leave it without regret. ... You know,' he said, 'they don't even believe that we can speak like this or choose our own destiny. We have chosen to go away and we are going. Soon everything will end and they will have only ashes.' (DW 204)

While this novel may indeed eulogize in advance the inevitable destiny of Aborigines and their culture as Wilson states (Wilson 2009, 20), there is, however a positive and empowering side to this novel. Despite all the years of being silenced and excluded, the Aboriginals now have their voices heard. Aboriginal literature, once exotic oddity for the white reader is no longer marginal. Perhaps this was the final form of resistance Mudrooroo was trying to achieve with this novel. Although an official British government report from 1837 (Blackstock 2000, 71-72) considered Aborigines and their culture soon to be extinct, it still exists. They have surely contributed in the formation of the culture of present day Australia. This novel is undeniably a part of Tasmanian cultural reformation that has constructed a new national identity. Mudrooroo manages to bridge the gap between the Aboriginal past and the present. Some remnants of the old spirituality of Aborigines will always linger in Aboriginal life in Australia.

#### **4 Male vs. Female Perspectives**

One group of people who have always been in the margins in the male-dominated world are women. Women, especially those belonging to minority groups, i.e. indigenous women, were often found themselves in difficult position in colonial communities. They have been in the margins much in the same way the colonised peoples were. Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin (2002, 172) argue that “(women) share with colonized races and peoples an intimate experience of the politics of oppression and repression, and like them they have been forced to articulate their experiences in the language of their oppressors”. Not so long ago many women writers used a male pseudonym to get their books published and voices heard (Lanser 1992, 88). Politics, education and religion were all ruled by men. Likewise, national identities of colonised regions sprung from masculinised memory (Enloe 1983, 44).

As a result of Eurocentric perspectives, the position of indigenous women was even worse than that of European women during the times of colonisation. Spivak further developed the term subaltern, focusing especially on indigenous women. As I already mentioned, according to her, subaltern women are deeply in the shadows (Spivak 1999 274). By shadows, I should imagine, she means the furthest from the centre; the white male. The opinions of indigenous women are caught in translation, and those women are never truly able to express themselves (Sharp 2009, 109-130). Therefore, when constructing a historical picture, the subaltern women’s story may reveal even more about colonised societies than the Eurocentric focus.

Furthermore, Aboriginal women and women of other colonised peoples are often mentioned as being “doubly colonised”. Kirsten Holst Petersen and Anna Rutherford suggest that women are under two forms of governance (i.e. double colonized);

imperialism and patriarchy (Ashcroft, Griffiths & Tiffin 2002, 206). However, they continue that the term is debatable. It is left unclear whether it means that women are post-colonial by definition because of the patriarchal nature of imperialism or only refers to two comparable and overlapping forms of dominance (Ashcroft, Griffiths & Tiffin 2002, 206).

As the main focus of this thesis is the difference in perspectives, as well as different histories, the histories of men and women are sure to differ greatly from one another. Women have been excluded from history books much in the same way the different ethnic minorities have been left out of the “official”, white narratives. In a way, women have their own counter-narrative to tell. Although the main character in this novel is a man, there are a few female characters, as well. They are usually seen through male eyes, but a reader does catch an occasional glimpse into the thoughts of these women, even more so towards the end of the novel.

In this chapter, I shall dedicate subsections to white women and Aboriginal women, and how they are portrayed in the text. Then, I will also discuss the images of men in the text, both white and Aboriginal. I will keep the subchapter on men short on purpose, because they have already been dealt with in such detail above. Finally, I shall examine how relationships between men and women are described in this novel. The idea of women being doubly marginalised is a fertile topic to keep in the discussion, as well.

#### **4.1 White Women**

According to official Australian history, there were three distinct groups of white women in Australia (Daniels & Murnane 1980; Oxley & Richards 2001, 30). The first and by far the largest group of white women were the convicts, to which the new colony gave a

chance to improve their skills as well as their position in life. The next group, free settlers, were attracted to the opportunities a new country could offer. The last group were the wives of those responsible for the society. In general women came to Australia, either as punishment for their crimes or by their own will (Oxley & Richards 2001, 30).

Earlier importation of a large number of men had resulted in substantial gender imbalance (Oxley & Richards 2001, 30). While this imbalance had significant impact on female-male relations during the early period of colonisation, before 1850s a large-scale migration of European women to Australia had already begun (Oxley & Richards 2001, 30). A British government reward program encouraged migration of married couples and single women. Especially the less privileged women were enticed to Australia with cheap tickets. These women often ended up in miserable places, with limited options to survive.

While the history of colonised Australia offers us a wide variety of interesting white women, there is virtually only one white female character in this novel: G.A. Robinson's wife, Marie. She is the quintessential colonial woman: upper-middle class, idle and carrying out her role as a wife of someone important. According to Nayar (2010, 104) European women's contribution to the imperial mission was to uphold the values and morals of their culture. In this novel, Marie's role in the community is obscure. Her husband, G.A. Robinson, on the contrary, is attempting to do precisely what Nayar described as the woman's part: maintaining order in the community, especially among the convicts but also among the natives. He tries constantly to impose his values and morals on the people that are savages in his eyes, although not always successfully:

Robinson, pale with rage, struggled to compose himself before speaking. He had always tried to help such degraded types by bringing to them the message of good cheer; he had often admonished them, but far too often, because their souls were hardened and blackened by many years of foul living, they had greeted his mere appearance with muttered oaths. (DW 59)

Marie's lack of influence both on her husband and on matters of the society reflects the patriarchal society of real colonial times. Marie loses every argument she has with her husband and is able to do very little to improve her own circumstances while her husband is away most of the time. Marie is often trying to convince her husband to stay with her in Hobartton but to no avail: "Then consider my protection in this outlandish town filled with roving criminals. I hardly know a soul apart from a few soldiers' wives and not one of them comes from London" (DW 55).

While the British described the Aborigines as being the most degraded and uncivilised of the human race, the white women may have felt the burden of being more privileged and affluent than their coloured sisters. Syed and Ali (2011, 350) describe this "white woman's burden" as a cause to the urge to educate and civilise the native women. In *Dr. Wooreddy's Prescription* Trugernanna receives such help when Robinson has come to Hobartton to show everyone his success:

A group of female num, hearing about the Aboriginal girl, descended on the Robinson household with shrill cries of delight. They saw Trugernanna with her cropped hair and shapeless smock and oohed and aahed over the handsome young savage...They bore off the passive Trugernanna for tea and cakes, and a complete change of clothing...She was arrayed in all the finery of long past London fashion. (DW 55-56)

In their willingness to help, the white women try to make Trugernanna more like them by dressing her in a similar style. Perhaps this kind of whitewashing made the foreign and strange seem less scary and alien to them. Trugernanna was delighted in her new clothing and pranced proudly in front of Robinson (DW 56). Robinson, on the other hand, wanted none of the Western depravity to reach his innocent charges, and he made empty the efforts of his wife and her friends (DW 56).

Overall, white women have only an insignificant role in this book. One might argue that they are the most marginalised and disregarded group of people in this novel, judging



by the lack of their presence. The character of Marie is a victim of imperial politics in the sense that she has had to leave her homeland against her wishes, and the victim of patriarchy as her husband makes all the decisions. Therefore, in this narrative, she might be regarded as the doubly colonised and the subaltern who does not have a voice. Whether the white woman is portrayed as such on purpose or not, such lack of presence still serves as a pronounced way to emphasise the reversal of perspective from the margins to the centre.

The lack of white female characters may also be an echo of colonial adventure stories. Olli Löytty remarks in his book *Valkoinen Pimeys* (1997), that there is usually a lack of white female characters in colonial adventure books. According to Löytty (1997, 37), the figure of a white female might be in the background to remind the hero of his homeland but, at the same time, she represents the opposite to the freedom of the adventure. A white woman symbolises the suffocating but safe civilisation. This is certainly true of Marie Robinson's character. She is the boring wife at home, guaranteed to be there at the end of every adventure among the exciting "savages". She is quite the opposite of the character of Trugernanna, who is often the target of Robinson's admiration.

## **4.2 Aboriginal Women**

The Aborigines were hunter gatherers and upheld egalitarian values (Elkin, 1956, 44). In egalitarian societies women joined men in production of basic necessities, and relations between genders were based on the reciprocal change of goods and services (Etienne & Leacock 1983, 9). In contrast to European women, the indigenous women were

autonomous; they were able to decide over their own lives in the same way as men were (Leacock 1978, 226).

The role of women in the Aboriginal society is described well in this novel; they acquired and cooked the food and looked after the children. The Aboriginal women possess a talent none of the men have: they are able to swim in the ocean and catch seafood. According to their folklore and common belief the women are immune to the evil that lurks in the sea. “His wife, Lunna, protected by her femaleness from the sea, pushed the craft into deeper water” (DW 18).

The Aboriginal women in this story are the true survivors. They are not only very able to support themselves and adapt to changing situations, but they even learn how to take advantage of the circumstances: “Trugernanna and the other island women went there [the whaling station] for both food and excitement,” (DW 25). The Aboriginal women are also described as sly creatures who exploit their womanhood in order to achieve their goal, at least with the white men, and Trugernanna was not an exception: “In the past she had found sex to be a weapon useful for survival and felt little pleasure in it. She gave her body in exchange for things and that was where the importance lay” (DW 47).

The heroine of the novel, Wooreddy’s second wife Trugernanna is part of the story from the beginning, and she is one of the two surviving women in the end. Mudrooroo draws a picture of a strong woman capable of being a good provider: “Trugernanna, young and agile, squat and strong, was a powerful swimmer who enjoyed her mastery of the watery element,” (DW 38). Trugernanna is often the target of G.A. Robinson’s admiration and lust. She represents the forbidden fruit which makes her even more desirable: “Robinson’s mouth went dry and his ruddy face paled as the women rose like

succubi from hell to tempt him with all the dripping nakedness of firm brown flesh” (DW 43). Löytty describes this kind of sexual desire towards ‘the other’ as being ambivalent in nature containing feelings of attraction as well as aversion (Löytty 1997, 36). G.A. Robinson’s thoughts on Trugernanna fluctuate; at times, he is uncomfortably aware of her body but on the other hand, he sees her as a child-like creature in need of help.

Other Aboriginal women portrayed in the text at any length are Wooreddy’s first wife Lunna, Ummarrah’s wife Dray and guerrilla leader Walyer. Wooreddy’s first wife, Lunna, was not from the same tribe as Wooreddy. She was a foreign woman, and he had been observing men who had foreign wives from early on in his life. Wooreddy had come to the conclusion that foreign women are demanding and they keep their men in check:

Foreign women expected their men always to return laden with game from the hunt. They expected their menfolk to be always attentive and when they quarrelled, the wife instantly threatened to return to her own country or to find a better man. (DW 8)

Wooreddy married Lunna against his better judgement. On the other hand, the comments about foreign women seem to be humorous, and not to be taken seriously: “Ayah! Indeed he had been caught like the crayfish he was eating and put in the basket of this foreign woman without even realising it” (DW 24).

Ummarrah’s wife, Dray, receives surprisingly little attention in the novel when considering that she is one of the two surviving women in the end. She is mentioned here and there throughout the story, but only when Wooreddy notices her she becomes an important character in the book. Wooreddy has a brief affair with Dray: “She had been the sole survivor. This fact interested Wooreddy as much as her rounded hips and strong thighs” (DW 70). Wooreddy has an affair with Dray, but not much is said about it in the novel. Only one remark made in passing: “While the camp slept Wooreddy and Dray

practised a particularly involved version of righting the catamaran” (DW 76). Their relationship is apparently short-lived and physical in nature.

The guerrilla leader Walyer, on the other hand, makes only a short appearance in the book, yet she receives plenty of attention from the men. She is based on a real historical character, who actually led a band of warriors, was captured by G.A. Robinson and died of influenza in captivity (Matson-Green, 2005). In the novel, G.A. Robinson describes her as a famous amazon, and calls her the pride of his collection (DW 126). Wooreddy observes her to be hard-eyed, firm bodied and equipped with a demanding voice (DW 116-118). Walyer is another woman Wooreddy had an affair with. However, this affair was depicted being more romantic than any of Wooreddy’s earlier relationships: “She found a certain peace and a slight happiness in him. Like newly-weds they ran off to be by themselves in some romantic sun-drenched place. There they lay in each others’ arms and shared their sadnesses” (DW 120). Walyer is an impressive figure capable of commanding and leading men. This may be the reason she is such a central character for a short while in the novel. Everyone seems to admire Walyer, other Aborigines as well as G.A. Robinson and Governor Arthur. She is considered so important for Robinson’s mission that Robinson and the Aborigines work extra hard in persuading Walyer and her men to join their party. None of the other female characters enjoy such respect as she does (DW 115-126).

### **4.3 Aboriginal Men vs. White Men**

The characteristics of men in this novel have already been described to some extent in preceding chapters. As I already stated, the white men are referred to as *num* or ghosts through the novel. Usually they are not depicted in detail, mostly they are only mentioned

every now and then in relation to some murders or rapes. It seems they are deliberately kept distant from the reader in order to focus the attention to the Aboriginal characters, and to emphasise even further the importance of their role in this narrative.

There are two key male characters: Wooreddy and George Augustus Robinson. Whereas Wooreddy is described as a man of science and philosophy (i.e. referred to as the good doctor throughout the novel), G.A. Robinson is made into an almost comical character. Robinson is portrayed as a simple, working class man who is often mocked not only by the natives but also by the convicts. Especially his way of speaking meets slander among the convicts who are working for him. They have no respect for the man because of his futile efforts to keep up a superior appearance although he is originally only a bricklayer. The convicts find it most amusing when Robinson's well-practised accent momentarily lapses to a working-class vernacular:

‘Sir, it is too disgusting, too disgusting for words,’ he spluttered, fighting to control his pronunciation. ‘Sir, ‘ow can you allow your men to take advantage of these poor creatures? Sir, it won’t be permitted, I ‘ave t’ear ob t’gov’nor’. (DW 36)

In the course of the novel, it becomes obvious that Wooreddy's speech and train of thought, are very eloquent and rational, and he takes pride in his own language. He makes repeated remarks, when listening to his elders, of how complex and full of intricacies their language is. He also spends time contemplating the language of the ghosts: “Wooreddy wondered if the ghosts had honorifics and specific forms of address. Perhaps it was not even a real language? –but then each and every species of animal had a language, and so it must be!” (DW 20-21). In comparison with G.A. Robinson, Wooreddy is the learned one who analyses everything he witnesses, whereas Robinson rushes into situations without a plan, and certainly does not spend time wondering about the complexities of Bruny language (DW 39).

Robinson is further rendered as the epitome of a British imperialist: pompous and condescending towards the natives and a firm believer in the white man's burden to civilise and Christianise the poor savages (DW 31, 33). His attitude towards the Aborigines is evident from the first encounter of Robinson and Wooreddy. Robinson reaches the shore, and meets Wooreddy on the beach. He manages to shake hands with him, and says: "Such a poor, poor creature! Such a wretched being bereft of everything we civilised people hold dear" (DW 30). This encounter is written from Wooreddy's point of view. He concentrates on Robinson's appearance and inspects it through his own cultural frame of what characteristics are valued in his society:

The num was short with a soft body plump from many days of good eating without hunting. Short, stubby legs marched that potbellied trunk over the sand with dainty, precise steps lacking the finesse of the hunter. Still there was something of the stamp of a sacred dance in the steps...The ghosts face, round like the moon, though unscarred, shone pink like the shoulder skin of the early morning sun. Sharp, sea-coloured eyes sought to bridge the gap between them. (DW 29)

Robinson's appearance does not impress Wooreddy, but it does make him harmless in his eyes. He is not a threat to Wooreddy in matters that he deems important, such as hunting, for example. Wooreddy accepts Robinson as his ally and protector. However, he soon discovers that Robinson feels superior to them. The Aborigines in *Dr. Wooreddy's Prescription* do not accept the white man's dominion readily. They are all very sensitive to Robinson's condescending demeanour, and Wooreddy especially takes his behaviour as an insult:

The Aborigines soon discovered that their ally considered himself superior to them. They were to be 'children' to his 'father'...Wooreddy felt insulted. After all he was a full citizen, not only of his nation, but of the South West too, and had he not collected, debated and even on one occasion refined a point of law regarding a custom of his people! (DW 33)

However, soon after this, he looks around and sees only sickness surrounding him, and he decides it is a small price to pay for survival, to call someone 'father' (DW 34).

Robinson's worldview is extremely dualistic in a way that he firmly believes that the Western way of doing things is the only correct one. He is of the opinion that he alone knows what is best for the Aborigines, and he does not like Aborigines and settlers communicating with each other. He is afraid of bad influence the settlers might have on the innocent Aborigines (DW 122-123). Robinson does not waver in his conviction

Wooreddy, on the other hand, is always ready to adjust his worldview and understand different beliefs and ways of doing things: "Wooreddy listened and made notes in his mind. It all seemed plausible and a variant of traditional theology" (DW 14). This shows Wooreddy's ability to change and readiness to accept people from different cultures.

#### **4.4 The Relationships of Men and Women**

Until recently, social scientists have paid little attention to the way gender relations transformed due to colonisation. For example, did the ideal of an obedient settler woman have an impact on the natives' expectations of their women, or vice versa. The descriptions of different gender relations in this novel are very revealing of women's status in the society. The novel's relationships between men and women are established on cultural and racial discrepancies: there are white couples, aboriginal couples and mixed-race couples.

The relationship between a man and a woman in real Aboriginal society was not based on dominance and subservience. It was a partnership, where men and women depended on each other in order to survive (Broome 1994, 9-21). As women in the indigenous, egalitarian communities carried a substantial role compared to women in European societies, the impact of colonisation on gender relations, however, may have

been most striking in these societies. This novel depicted a certain time in Australia's colonial past, and it portrayed well the distinctions in the gender relations of people from different cultures. These interrelations seem plausible and true to the time period. By highlighting these cultural differences, the author helps the reader to understand how great the clash of cultures was between the Aborigines and the colonialists.

The central indigenous character, Wooreddy is married twice in the novel, and both his aboriginal wives are portrayed as headstrong and independent in their daily chores. Both of them rely very little on their husband. Both his marriages are based on companionship, pragmatism and physical attraction rather than on romantic love: "Finally he accepted the fact that they were together, not for love, but for survival" (DW 48). Wooreddy and Trugernanna are not faithful to each other during their marriage, faithfulness is said to mean very little during those times (DW 47). They both have extra-marital affairs; Wooreddy with Dray and Walyer and Trugernanna with Ummarrah (DW 76, 120).

The only white-couple in this novel is G.A. Robinson and his wife Marie. Their marriage does not seem to be a partnership in the same manner as the Aboriginal couples' are. The husband appears to make all the important decisions; he is the head of the family. The role of the wife is submissive with very little responsibilities outside home. Their marriage is also not a loving one. It becomes apparent when Robinson ponders why he ever married such a woman. Marie Robinson is seen through her husband's eyes and described with less flattering terms: "He looked across at her. She was fat and her breath came in little gasps which got on his nerves [...] She gave a start, and her somewhat vacuous blue eyes flickered to his face and then away" (DW 54). She is portrayed as needy, lazy and whiny, and Robinson makes comments about her nagging (DW 53).



Robinson keeps his wife in a “golden cage”. She has a more affluent life in Australia yet she is not happy. She has very little to occupy her time since they are able to keep servants in their new home. She complains about her situation to her husband who is adamant in following his chosen career: “For us, for us, what about me? Stuck here all alone in this dump. You can’t do this to me. Why did I ever come to this place? Why did I?’ the wife fairly shrieked in her anguish” (DW 54-55). Towards the end of the novel, it becomes evident that neither of them is happy with how their life has turned out: “He sighed for those days of adventure. He was trapped on a lonely, desolate island with a dreary drab of a wife” (DW 151). While Robinson misses his adventures with the Aborigines and hates the stagnant life on Flinders Island settlement, he cannot admit that to his wife who hates it even more: “How anyone can live in such a miserable place is beyond me, it is!... This island is an island of the dead and the sooner we’re all dead, the better off we’ll be” (DW 151-152). As a couple, the Robinsons do not seem to be pulling together. They are not companions the same way the Aborigines in the novel are, and at least the husband appears to be happier when he is away from his wife.

In addition to same-race couples, the novel illustrates mixed-race couples as well. As already noted, not all Aboriginal women were passive victims of colonisation; some who had opportunity to alleviate their own exploitation did so by entering into official or unofficial marriage with European men (Pettman 1995, 72). A common pattern of sexual unions between settlers and indigenous people, at least at the early stages of settlement, was a ‘double standard’; sexual relations between settler men and indigenous women might be tolerated but certainly not those of indigenous men and settler women (Weitzer 1990, 30-31). The same double-standard can be observed in the novel, as well. There was no reference in the novel of a white woman having a relationship with a native man, but

there are descriptions of sexual relations and even relationships between native women and white men.

This novel portrays a few mixed-race couples, some happier than others. One couple in particular, an older man who is married to Trugernanna's sister, is described as happy and having no trouble between them (DW 144). However, G.A. Robinson has difficulties in accepting such union. This is what Robinson exclaims when he sees a white fisherman with his native wife:

Just look there, that disgusting old man lives with that native female, and there stands the result of their union, that boy there, a mixture of both races. What will happen to such hybrids? They show us our own immorality. (DW 144)

He sees the white man as disgusting and immoral and the native woman as a victim.

Another white man defends the couple of mixed race and their son:

‘Oh, go to Hell,’ Constable Munro said suddenly. ‘That child is a happy little bugger, and his mother and father are happy too. No trouble between them at all. It's sorts like you that have harmed the race. We live on these islands in our own way, then you come along to hound, not only us, but these poor women who have taken refuge with us. If they are held against their will, let them say so. Here is one of them, ask her! Do you think she will elect to go to that hellhole you call a station to die there in a few days?’ (DW 144)

Robinson tries to persuade the woman to leave the man, and to come and live at the settlement, but she refuses to go (DW 144). According to Löytty (1997, 36), sexual relations between settler men and native women were common during the colonial era. However, resulting offspring from those unions were an abomination (Löytty 1997, 37). Those of mixed blood were considered degenerate and even dangerous due to the European blood in them. The quote above is also an example of a rare occurrence in the novel; white men are described in a decent fashion, and that they are treating the Natives as human beings.

Overall, marriage between the Aborigines and mixed-race couples is described much more equal than marriage of a white couple. Robinson's wife has to succumb to her husband's will, and her pleas to return to England go unnoticed: "Any opposing of wills in the Robinson household always ended with the husband calling on the Lord to back him up [...] She knew that her husband would win" (DW 55).

Wooreddy's marriages, on the other hand, seem to be different. Wooreddy has very little sway over his wives despite his efforts: "He preferred seafood, when he could get it, for sometimes when he ordered his wife to go and get some she appeared not to hear" (DW 26). The only inter-racial marriage depicted in the novel in any detail, is very similar to Wooreddy's relationships: "'You're lucky you live with that num and are free to do what you like.' 'Yeah, and he's too old to hinder me, too,' Lowernunhe replied with a grin" (DW 142). In these relationships, neither of the partners have power over the other. The Aborigines have their own ideas, of course, of what chores were women's duties and what men's. However, the roles were not as fixed as they perhaps were in a Western society. This is how Waau, the head of an Aboriginal encampment, sees it: "'Women's work' he explained, 'but if one is not around, we do it'" (DW 191).

## 5 Conclusion

I have studied Mudrooroo's novel *Dr. Wooreddy's Prescription for Enduring the Ending of the World* (1983) for my thesis. My main focus has been on the counter narrative the novel gives to traditional, Eurocentric history of Australia. In addition to this counter narrative, I have also been interested in the way women's perspective differs from men's, and what kind of role women have in this novel. In short, this thesis is about opposite stories; the histories of white colonialists and the Australian Aborigines, the different stories of men and women, and those of white women and aboriginal women. They all have different histories to tell, and I have tried to find out if and how they emerge in this novel.

In the first chapter I focused on different histories. I read *Dr. Wooreddy's Prescription* bearing Said's concept of contrapuntality in my mind (Said 1993, 37). I analysed how traditional history compares to the counter narrative in the novel. The novel, overall, is an epic tragedy, a provoking story that centres on the Aboriginal genocide that occurred in Tasmania in the 19th century.

The novel is based on the actual diaries of a Christian missionary, the Chief Protector of Aborigines, George Augustus Robinson (Kerr 1988, 59). Therefore, the origins of the story are in traditional history. The author, Mudrooroo Narogin deliberately restyles earlier interpretations of the genocide of the Tasmanians and focuses on the years between 1829 and 1842. The years preceding 1829 were marked with violent conflicts between the Europeans and the Tasmanian Aborigines. These conflicts led to the almost complete eradication of the Aborigines, and the surviving ones were deprived of their own language, myths, traditions and even their own names. Many, who had survived the Black War, died on the island of diseases brought by the Europeans.

In *Dr. Wooreddy's Prescription*, Mudrooroo interprets the genocide of Tasmanian Aboriginals through the life of an indigenous character of Wooreddy. The line between history and fiction is a blurred one in this novel. Almost all characters in this novel have close resemblances in actual history, and the author has based his work on the diaries of a white colonist, as I already stated. At the very beginning of the novel Wooreddy interpreted a bad omen as a sign of the world coming to an end. In the course of the novel, the extinction of Aboriginal people and their culture became imminent, Wooreddy's prophecy came true in the end, and the story travelled a full circle. The novel ends in the death of the last Bruny Island male, Wooreddy.

In the second chapter I discussed the genre of the novel, and how it influenced the air of historical accuracy of the novel. The genre, historiographic metafiction, as Joanne Tompkins categorised it (Tompkins 1990, 485), offers an excellent medium to rewriting history. This genre seeks to blur the line between history and fiction because historical narratives are not the absolute truth, but rather someone's truth. While Western history has almost excluded the Aborigines altogether, *Dr. Wooreddy's Prescription* brings them to focus. The author has chosen to tell the story from an Aboriginal's point of view, and to use historiographic metafiction as his medium. Consequently, Mudrooroo gives a voice to a colonial subaltern. However, this reconstructed voice of the fictional Tasmanian could be interpreted also as a colonialist product. According to Patrick Brantlinger's book *Dark Vanishings: Discourse on the extinction of primitive races 1800-1930* (2003) the novel can be considered as a proleptic elegy, which means it is mourning the passing of something in advance, in this case the Tasmanian Aborigines. This again means, that Mudrooroo allocated the same predestined fate to the Tasmanians as the colonialists did.

Therefore, if an Aboriginal subaltern is reconstructed according to how they are represented in this novel, the future of the Aboriginal culture is condemned.

However, the story as a whole, can be considered as Mudrooroo's protest against prior acts of imperialism. In his attempt to make the massacre and cultural genocide of the Tasmanian Aboriginals unjustified, Mudrooroo is deconstructing myths related to colonialism, such as social Darwinism and terra nullius. These two myths have justified the actions of colonialists. According to Social Darwinists the Aborigines and other people of different colour were savages and therefore at the bottom in the hierarchy of men (Degler 1992, 11). This theory tried to apply Darwin's concept of natural selection to human societies. In his effort to break down this belief, Mudrooroo disclosed examples of elaborate traditions and complex Aboriginal language that proved the idea of Aboriginal inferiority wrong. The representations of all indigenous characters in the novel remedy this belief, as well.

Furthermore, the myth of terra nullius, i.e. empty land that is free to be claimed, is made void by showing that the Aborigines were already there when the first white people came. There are also a few instances, where the Aborigines talk about their ancestors and how they left their mark in the land. Furthermore, the Aboriginals always belong to the land. This is highlighted already in the first sentence of the novel: "Wooreddy as a child and a young man belonged to Bruny Island" (DW 1). This sense of belonging is the Aboriginal equivalent of owning the land.

However, an important question arises: what motivated Mudrooroo to write this novel from this particular perspective? We may question Mudrooroo's, or Colin Johnson as he was known before, Aboriginal descent (Clark 2007, 27). We may also say the novel is written only to accuse the white people of colonialist atrocities. According to Said this

kind of rhetoric of blame is not uncommon in postcolonial discourse. He states that when this kind of rhetoric is applied, the discussion is not constructive, and the only purpose is to put the blame on the other party. Said writes that “the tragedy of this experience, and indeed of so many postcolonial experiences, derives from the limitations of the attempts to deal with relationships that are polarized, radically uneven, remembered differently” (Said 1993, 19). This is, in his opinion, the cause for the hostility and finger pointing, and only encourages the rhetoric and politics of blame (Said 1993, 19).

Is Mudrooroo taking part in this finger pointing with this novel or is he just telling a story? In my opinion, there is a certain partiality to the natives in this novel, but that is hardly surprising when the author is trying to tell the story from their perspective. The natives do blame G.A. Robinson for bringing them only death and destruction (DW 184), but Robinson is not portrayed as a bad man. He thinks he is helping the natives with his actions which also comes across from the text, although his motivations are dubious at times. And even though the natives have to endure horrible deeds from the colonists and the convicts, they are shown to be capable of violence, as well. I would conclude that Mudrooroo could not have told this story from the perspective of the Aborigines without any finger pointing. But he is also promoting mutual appreciation through the diplomatic character of Wooreddy who made the effort to understand different people as well as different cultures.

In the third chapter I concentrated on male and female perspectives and gender relations. Women have been excluded from history books much in the same way the different ethnic minorities have been left out of the “official”, white narratives. According to Spivak (1999, 274), indigenous female subaltern is even more deeply in shadows than indigenous male is. However, one might argue that in this novel the white women are the

most marginalised and disregarded group of people simply due to their lack of presence. The white woman is depicted as dull and submissive to patriarchal and imperialistic dominance, which is typical of colonial adventure books, according to Olli Löytty (1997, 37). A white woman symbolises the suffocating but safe civilisation (Löytty 1997, 37).

The Aboriginal female on the contrary, is described as adventurous, independent, and having equal rights with men in the egalitarian Aboriginal societies. While the white women in the novel fall silently under patriarchal governance, the Aboriginal women are capable of fighting colonial dominance just like men, as the character of Walyer shows us. Mudrooroo describes several brutal actions of the colonists, often targeted at Aboriginal women. But despite all the hardships and cruelty these women have to suffer in the story, they are depicted as the true survivors in this novel.

The descriptions of Aboriginal men and white men in this novel are quite different from each other. White men are usually not depicted in detail, and to my opinion it seems that they are almost deliberately kept distant from the reader in order to focus the attention to the Aboriginal characters, and to emphasise even further the importance of their role in this narrative. The key male characters are each other's opposites: Wooreddy is described as a man of science and philosophy, while Robinson is made into an almost comical character, a caricature of a British imperialist.

While the novel is narrated by an omniscient voice, the narrator always seems a little partial to Wooreddy. Mudrooroo is obviously trying to make it clear to the readers that Wooreddy's account of the events is the truth. I argue that he purposely uses terminology such as 'witness', 'question' and 'investigate' throughout the novel to add credibility to the experiences of Wooreddy. Towards the end of the novel, Wooreddy sinks into his thoughts and no longer cares what happens to him. This makes the narrator



focus less on Wooreddy and more on the other surviving Aborigines. In this sense, especially the end of the novel is about atrophy, alienation and loneliness that accompany the loss of sense of history and own identity.

Moreover, the novel manages to portray various relationships of men and women; white couples, Aboriginal couples and mixed-race couples. There was a huge difference, how these couples are presented in this novel. The most striking distinction was in the equality of these relationships. The Aboriginal couples, and even the mixed-race ones represented greater freedom and equality between the partners; they were based on companionship. Instead, the only white couple in the novel revealed a relationship where the husband dominated the decision-making, and the wife had very little influence, which was perhaps historically accurate, as well. The role of wife and women in postcolonial world is indeed an interesting topic of research. While white men, and nowadays surprisingly also indigenous men are well portrayed in the Western literature, the role of women is not as recognised. The impact of imperialism and colonialism must have been most striking on gender relations and the status of indigenous women. Research on this topic would be a worthwhile pursuit, more information on this matter is needed. One could, for example, investigate the impact of colonialism from the perspective of Western women; whether contact with indigenous cultures had an effect on gender inequality in newly colonised countries.

I chose *Dr Wooreddy's Prescription* as the subject of my thesis out of interest for the novel. I saw it as a thought-provoking story told from a refreshing angle. Furthermore, the writer, Mudrooroo, is fairly unknown here in Finland. None of his novels have been translated into Finnish, and they have received very little attention among Finnish scholars. Additionally, the author's contested origins cause further complications on this

research. Mudrooroo certainly is a controversial character, accused of deliberately assuming an Aboriginal identity to legitimise his work (Nolan & Dawson 2004, 102-104). The assertion that Mudrooroo is not of Aboriginal descent will undoubtedly impact the weight given to his works. However, whether or not Mudrooroo actually is an Aborigine is immaterial for the effect of the novel, and for the work he has done to make Aboriginal culture more widely known and recognised. During the recent years there has been a definite increase in Australian historical novels. This historical fiction is targeting the white, often one-sided history of Australia, by focusing attention on the Aboriginal experience of well-known historical events, and thus contesting the predominant history. The Aborigines are claiming their identity back and renewing the awareness of their myths.

In conclusion, the novel offers a fresh perspective on the effects of colonialism, and gives a credible counter-narrative to typical, Western histories. Although it is a fictional story, the historical characters and known historical events make it seem less fictitious and more relevant to post-colonial discussion. The novel is a complex and maybe even contradictory rendering of the Aboriginal experience, where the line between fact and fiction remained blurry throughout the story. Nevertheless, it is exactly this ambiguous nature that produces many possible interpretations and raises many thoughts.

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